Testimony before the
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
United States House of Representatives

"9-11 COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS: COUNTERTERRORISM ANALYSIS AND COLLECTION/THE REQUIREMENT FOR IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY"

August 4, 2004

A Statement by

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Chairman Goss, Ranking Member Harman, it is an honor to be invited today to testify before your committee in conjunction with your review of the recommendations of the 9-11 Commission.

Let me say at the outset that your review is crucial. I believe we have a near constitutional crisis on our hands. The American public—and certainly the elected representatives of the public—have come to lose confidence in an intelligence community that we cannot live without. We must have a strong and effective intelligence community if we are to survive in the years ahead. We all bear responsibility for where we are today and for correcting the shortcomings to insure success in the future. Your review is crucial and I am grateful that you have initiated this inquiry.

At the outset let me say I believe the 9-11 Commission has rendered a great contribution to the nation. These fine individuals labored very hard to understand the implications of the attack. They have offered a comprehensive set of recommendations, and these are serious recommendations. They should be the starting point for a serious review by the Congress.

I would ask you, Mr. Chairman and Rep. Harman, to not be stampeded into rubberstamping these recommendations. I know this will be a much harder thing now that President Bush has weighed in on some of the key recommendations. The Commission's report and the President's new plan represent a valuable starting point for a much-needed debate. But these recommendations need to be fully vetted so that we understand all the implications they hold. There are no easy answers to the problems we face. We will have to make choices that solve some problems and create new ones. Your challenge is to fine-tune this process to the maximum extent so that we adopt the changes which bring as much positive benefit as possible, and moderate the negative consequences.

I admire very much the work of the 9-11 Commission and its co-chairs. So my comments today—while they might be interpreted by some as critical of the Commission—are really designed to build on their good work.

Balancing between "connect the dots" and "group think"

My first concern about the Commission report is that the entire reorganization proposal is optimized around one problem. This is understandable. The Commission was established to examine the problems the government had detecting and preventing the terrorist attack on September 11. By definition, that was a problem of coordination among the elements of the government. There was too little coordination, both within organizations (usually from lower levels to more senior policy-making levels) and across organizations. This is often referred to as the "connect the dots" problem.

But that is not the only problem we have with the government that involves intelligence activities. We have the major problem of intelligence in support of the war in Iraq, and the near-unanimous conviction in the community, including myself, that we would find mountains of chemical and biological weapons in Iraq, and we found nothing.

That is every bit as serious a problem as is the "connect the dots" problem.

This committee has held hearings into the intelligence failings associated with the war in Iraq. When I appeared before you, I said that I believe the tendency to group-think is inherent in our system. Despite the sophistication and size of these organizations, the intelligence community is still relatively small and isolated. The community is understandably and necessarily preoccupied with protecting sources and methods. And bureaucracies naturally fight for resources. In that kind of an environment, intelligence bureaucrats, like bureaucrats of any type, strive to please their policy bosses. Taken together, these factors contribute too much to a narrowness of perspective. The shorthand label given to this problem is "group think."

When I testified before you, I argued that we needed to fight that narrowness of perspective by creating more competition for ideas in the intelligence assessment world. I believe the competition for ideas is improved when different organizations reporting to different bosses compete for better insights and perspectives. Our system tries to do that, but too often falls short because of constrained resources and artificial barriers. I worry, honestly, that bringing together the entire intelligence community under a single boss who exercises budget control and personnel control, will even further constrain the constructive competition of ideas I believe we need within the intelligence community.

So to my mind, we have a tradeoff. The two great problems—"connecting the dots" and avoiding "groupthink"—are in tension with each other. Both are problems today. Launching an organizational solution to just one of the problems will worsen the other, I fear. So to my mind, we need to find a solution that strikes a practical balance.

I will return to this with my concluding comments, where I offer some suggestions for consideration by the Committee.

Director of National Intelligence as a "political" officer of the government

Second, if you decide to concur with President Bush's recommendation to create a Director of National Intelligence, we need to consider carefully the question of where to locate the office organizationally. More specifically, how do we strike a balance between professional detachment and political effectiveness?

Again let me say at the outset I do not consider it bad that we have political officers in the government. Frankly that is a good thing. I think politics is a very good thing. It drives innovation in our government. We want our political parties to compete for good ideas. The President is also the senior political figure of his party. This is what our constitutional framers intended and it is a good thing.

We organize our government in such a way that the closer you get to the President, the more political the job. We have political appointees for practically every department, independent agency and bureau. That is a good thing. Ultimately the accountability of these agencies (in addition to basic legal accountability) is political. We need political appointees

to connect the activities of the agency to the President. The further down you go in the government, the less "political" the leadership. Our civil servants are expressly supposed to be non-political.

Now we ask the question: What is the role you want for the Director of National Intelligence? If you locate that individual in the White House, by definition you are putting him into the most political setting of the Executive Branch. You can say all you want that he or she won't be political, but that is not logical in our system. By the way, I want political people in the White House. That is what our system is designed to do and I think it works better for that reason. But do you want to have your chief intelligence officer be a political personality?

Let me also say I don't want a DNI who is anti-political. I don't want a DNI who panders to the political goals of the President, but I also don't want a DNI who is so anti-political that he alienates himself from the President. I don't want a DNI who is either the "first buddy" or the "first hair shirt" to the President. And here I think organizational location makes a difference.

I would not locate the DNI in the White House for four reasons. First, I think the intelligence chief should not be more political than the Secretary of Defense or the Secretary of State. Indeed, the DNI should probably be less political. So some distance from the White House is in order. Second, a powerful DNI in the White House will become a competing power center with the National Security Adviser. I thought it was a big mistake to separate homeland security from national security. Adding a far more powerful DNI into the White House complex will cause great tensions with the National Security Council system. That would be bad.

Third, if the DNI is going to be in charge of domestic surveillance on American citizens, you do not want that function grounded in the White House. That function, in my mind, needs to be overseen by the Attorney General. I think that kind of oversight will be much harder if the DNI is located in the White House complex. Frankly, it is also bad politics for the President. Every intelligence problem then becomes a political problem for the incumbent.

Fourth, the CIA conducts clandestine operations. In recent years these have become rather large operations, in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. In essence the CIA is fielding a very capable, small army in Afghanistan. I honestly don't think you want to locate clandestine field operations in the White House. The oversight structures that work for Defense Department operations would not be in play. And everyone would presume the very worst and lay it at the doorstep of the President on an ongoing basis.

Improving the "demand" for better intelligence

The third observation I would like to bring to the Committee deals with a positive aspect of the 9-11 Commission's recommendations. I testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee recently. Everyone argues that the intelligence community needs a Goldwater-

Nichols type of reform. I was on the staff of the Senate Armed Services Committee when that landmark legislation was written. The key to the success of Goldwater-Nichols was the way it strengthened institutions inside the Defense Department to demand better defense capabilities from the military services. The military services—Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force—"supply" defense capabilities. The unified field commanders and the Joint Chiefs "demand" better capabilities. It is the tension between supply and demand within the Defense Department that constituted the great success of Goldwater-Nichols.

The 9-11 Commission tried to deal with this issue and I think has a good starting point. If you look at the organizational chart on page 413 of the 9-11 Commission report, you see their effort to structure both the "supply" and the "demand" side of the intelligence community. The existing agencies are responsible for hiring, training, acquiring, equipping and fielding intelligence capabilities. The other large box on the chart—the National Intelligence Centers—are in theory the operational elements, the "demand" side of the ledger.

The basic architecture is right, I think. But there are very important engineering details that need to be worked out. In the Defense Department, the Army never conducts a war. A regional combatant commander does, using the forces supplied by the Army. Is that what we will be doing here? And if so, how will it work? The report outlines only the barest of details here, and does not discuss the necessary questions of authorities, procedural changes, resource issues, to include budgets and personnel, and so forth. I understand this is beyond the scope of a Commission report. But these details are critical. It took us years to work out these details in the Defense Department. It will take years here as well. But I think it is a very important innovation and the Commission deserves credit for it.

Reservations about giving the DNI control over DoD intelligence operations

You may consider me parochial here, and perhaps I am. I used to be the chief operating officer for the Defense Department when I served as the deputy secretary. So I admit I am probably biased. But I have great reservations about making the DNI—through a deputy—the boss of all the intelligence operations in the Defense Department.

DoD does get a finished analytic product from the intelligence community. But we also get the raw electrons on the battlefield and we use them in our war fighting. Indeed, the key to the modern American style of warfare depends entirely on the most intimate interconnection between our intelligence capabilities and our war-making capabilities, at all levels. I know that the Commission is not recommending removing the intelligence agencies from DoD, but they are setting up a worrisome tension in the system when they make the undersecretary who is in charge of all DoD intelligence activities a deputy to the DNI, and have all funding come through the DNI. I can't and won't argue that you can't make it work. But frankly the tension and controversy that exists today in budgetary and personnel matters between DoD and the DCI will get far worse, I predict, under this formula.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Harmon, you are carrying a burden for the entire American people with this review. We count on you to do two things—protect us from foreign threats and secure our liberty at home. We want our government to protect us, and we want to be protected from our own government. This is a dilemma inherent in a republic, and especially in American democracy. My one plea is that you take your time here and consider all dimensions of the problem. And debate it openly within the committee. We will make mistakes no matter what we do. But the only great mistake we can make is to settle too quickly on a single solution and to squelch all debate for the sake of ramming something through the system. There are many critical details that have to be worked out, and a level of planning and analysis needed to insure these organizational changes will be effective and not introduce other problems. We are counting on your wise leadership to make this the kind of thoughtful and far-reaching deliberation that these issues demand.

Thank you for inviting me to testify. I am pleased to answer any questions the Committee would choose to ask.